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Ag~knowledge

a newsletter for Alberta Agriculture staff

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Goats, grants and good humor

day in the life of a district
office secretary



Idris Pickrell is one of 168 support staff who meet the public daily as part of our field service team.

Idris Pickrell plays every day by ear. As secretary at Alberta Agriculture's Barrhead office, she aims there's no such thing as a typical day.

nce she started with the department

in September 1973, Idris' days have been filled with all sorts of un-typical events. She recalls the first year as being the most trying and hectic because of two new programs — emergency assistance for farmers unable to complete harvest because of snow, and the summer farm employment program. "People were lined up out the door to apply," Idris remembers. Also, the DA was away so the DA-in-training was trying to fill in.

Idris sees her most important role as an information source, whether it be on the telephone or at the reception counter. She spends a major portion of her time filling requests for publications. Idris finds publications on home economics and horticulture the most popular. And, for some reason the Barrhead office gets an unusually large number of requests for information on goats!

Dealing with irate farmers or their wives is a common occurrence for Idris, but she's learned to handle it. "Most of the time they just need someone to listen," she says.

People in the district tend to regard Idris and the office in general as a contact for information on just about everything. Idris gets requests ranging from where to find parts for a cream separator to where to buy a certain kind of wool.

Idris believes public image is the most important consideration when working in a district office. She follows two rules: "Be helpful to the people," and "If you don't the answer, find out."

Idris' considerable experience in working with the public is one of the secrets to her success. "You have to know how to read people," she says. "As soon as someone walks into the office I can tell whether he's the kind of person I can joke around with."

One person she didn't joke around with was the farmer who had his shotgun confiscated by the authorities and stormed into the office assuming Alberta Agriculture would be able to help him get it back.

More typical remarks from the public seeking information are along the lines of, "I thought I'd check with you first," or "Phone the DA's office; they'll know." There are also some regulars who call the office weekly with questions.

One change Idris has noticed over the past few years is that the office is constantly busy. "It used to slow down during the summer but now there's no real slack period at all," she observes.

Idris is active in the Barrhead community and her list seems to grow each year. She's worked with 4-H at all levels: club leader, council secretary, judge of handicrafts and horses. Idris was also a director with the Barrhead ag society and secretary-treasurer of the Alberta Angus Club. She's participated in figure skating and served on the local horse show committee. Her most recent interest is showing her two Dobermans. □

question box

Q: I notice that the Style Sheet from print media branch says that *labour*, along with several other words, should be spelled without the *u*. I know the English speak with a funny dialect, but they did provide us with a format for proper spelling. The Americans have chosen to be lazy and change the spelling of some words. Is it mandatory for all releases from the department to have these words misspelled or is it optional?

Scott Reid, head of print media branch, replies: The suggestions in the Style Sheet follow the *Canadian Press Style Book*, which most newspaper editors use. We prefer to have the department's articles go into the newspaper instead of the editor's waste-basket, so we give them what they want.

With documents other than press releases, it's your personal choice. We ask only that writers be consistent.

You might be interested in what the English themselves say about this. *Fowler's Modern English Usage* says that those who are willing to look at the question objectively often find fewer British *our* words than *or* words than they expected, and second, there seems to be no reason for the difference. For every *our* words you can find at least as many *or* words — *horror, pallor, tremor* and *governor*. Fowler's concludes, "It is not worthwhile to resist such a change or fly in the face of national sentiment by trying to hurry it; it would need a very open-minded Englishman to accept *armor* and *succor* with equanimity."

Q: We're all aware of the recent job terminations in Alberta Agriculture. Is personnel doing anything to help these people deal positively with this traumatic situation? Are these people favored for other jobs that may come up with the government?

Brian Black, director of personnel, replies: As a result of downsizing, 22 employees in Alberta Agriculture will have their positions abolished by the end of the fiscal year.

Where this decision has been finalized, the employees have already received written notification of the pending position abolishment.

Under the position abolishment provisions, employees whose positions are abolished receive at least three months' written notice, and the right to be appointed to any available comparable position in the public service for 180 days following the abolishment. Should no position materialize, they receive severance pay.

In the case of our staff, personnel services has contacted employees who have been notified, and assisted and counselled them. As a result of these efforts, a number of employees have already been placed in alternative positions. Others have elected to retire or resign. At present, 13 of the 22 employees remain on the position abolishment list and we are continuing to assist them. Personnel is hopeful that by the end of the fiscal year we will have found employment for many of these remaining employees affected by this difficult situation.

The Question Box is your opportunity to ask questions of senior management. Send your question to *Ag-knowledge* and we'll pass it on for a reply, and print both questions and answers. You must include your name and telephone number but the question will be forwarded without your name and no names will appear in this newsletter. *Ag-knowledge*, c/o Print Media Branch, 7000 - 113 St., Edmonton.

Deputy Minister's column

AEC and agriculture

Eleven years ago the Alberta government approved the concept of an interdepartmental facility to study and solve problems pertaining to the environment. They decided to locate the Alberta Environmental Centre (AEC) at Vegreville.

The large and very modern laboratory/office complex covering 16,700 square metres was located just west of town on a 300-hectare farm. The official opening of the \$28 million facility was in 1981.

AEC is a unique interdepartmental and interdisciplinary research and service facility. The agencies that worked together to plan and staff the centre were Environment, which became the manager; Agriculture, which transferred its entire plant industry laboratory; Energy and Natural Resources; Social Services and Community Health; Workers' Health, Safety and Compensation; and the Alberta Research Council.

AEC has two major mandates. The first is to conduct studies or supply services requested by client departments of the Alberta government. The second is to conduct applied research at the request of client departments to address specific, identified problems.

The ultimate scale of services of AEC is not yet fully developed but clearly Agriculture, as a co-founder and cooperator, views AEC as an important part of our scientific service to the citizens of the province of Alberta. We will continue to maintain a strong tie with the centre and its staff. □

— H.B. McEwen

meet the ADMs no. 3 of 5

**The administration man
Doug Radke
Assistant deputy
minister of
planning, economics
and administration**

Responsible for economic services, the planning secretariat, personnel services, financial services, communications, departmental services, internal audit. Member of the Alberta Grain Commission and the Board of Directors of Alberta Terminals Ltd.

Joined Alberta Agriculture in May, 1968 as executive assistant to the director of program development. Spent 1975 to 1979 with Alberta Transportation and 1979 to 1982 with the federal government. Returned to agriculture in December 1982.

Most memorable work experience: Direct participation in the Crow debate.

Hobbies: squash, skiing, personal computers. □

**wanted
★★★★★★★★★★
winners**

If you know someone on staff who has won an award or gone out of their way to do an especially fine job — let *Ag-knowledge* know.

Informing our informer

Molly Bassett, Alberta Agriculture's chief source of information for both staff and incoming visitors at the J.G. O'Donoghue Building in Edmonton, has three requests of department staff.

1. When you or a visitor call a cab, let Molly know so that she can call you when the driver arrives.
2. When scheduling meetings in any of the boardrooms, let Molly know. Then when people attending the meeting ask her where it's being held, she can direct them.
3. Finally, check the accuracy of your listing in the September 1984 department telephone directory. If any changes are needed, let Molly know, so she can keep the directory up to date and as useful as possible. (By the way, if you're having trouble finding names in the new directory, try reading left to right instead of top to bottom.) □



Staff chaff agri-bits

1. Which of the following is **not** among the 4-H projects offered in Alberta: 1) vet science 2) computer 3) farm first aid 4) snowmobiling?

2. Who is **Percy Gendall**?

3. Alberta Agriculture has a new film dealing with soil erosion, and it's stirring up a lot of dust. Name the film.

4. The Agro-Electronic Show, which attracted 2,000 people last year when it was held in Red Deer, is planned for a different location in 1985. Where?

5. According to the department's annual report, what percentage of farmers in the Peace River region were aware of Alberta Agriculture's services last year?

6. What has samples of 500 ink colors, costs \$75 and is missing from the art room in print media branch?

ANSWERS BELOW

1. Farm first aid is not a 4-H project.
2. Percy Gendall is the new executive assistant to our minister, Leroy Fjorbothen. Percy joined the minister's staff October 15 and is sharing the executive assistant responsibilities with Ken Moholling.
3. Gone With The Wind...Too? is the name of the film. Next year's Agro-Electronic Show will be held at Lakeland College in Vermilion March 1 and 2. Dave Scott (427-2181) can give you more information about the show.
5. 100 per cent of the farmers in region 6 were aware of Alberta Agriculture and its services, and 78 per cent of them made contact with one of the district offices in the last year (page 57 of the 1983-84 annual report).
6. The Pantone Color Book, which the artists use to decide on ink colors for publications. If you think this sounds like an appeal to return the book if you know its whereabouts, you're absolutely right!

Answers to Agri-bits

Engineers work with high pressure

This fall the engineering branch began exploring the use of high pressure fluids in agriculture.

Since for most of us "high pressure fluids" isn't exactly an everyday phrase, some background is in order. Water comes out of a normal household tap with a force of about 80 pounds per square inch. A coin-operated car wash operates up to 1,000 pounds. Push that pressure up to 2,000 pounds and you can blast barnacles off the bottom of a ship. Move it up to 10,000 pounds and you can cut concrete.

Adapting this to agriculture, explain John Kienholz and Randy Pointkoski of the engineering branch, may mean being able to inject liquid fertilizer, herbicide or seed, or cutting through crop residues, without having to run heavy equipment over the field.

The use of high-pressure fluids is already being explored for agriculture in some parts of the United States. Along with the University of Alberta, our engineers will gather information and conduct experiments between now and next April.

They're starting — and they emphasize this is a start — by determining the cutting characteristics of soil and plant materials with water under high pressure. Further down the road they will test high pressure systems for use with fertilizer as a furrow opener, and as a cutting tool for horticulture operations. □

On the move

Welcome to the following people, who have joined Alberta Agriculture for the first time: DAs-in-training **Adrian Van Biert** at Spirit River, **Brian Sawatzky** at Peace River, **Bruce Friedel** at Pincher Creek and **Kathleen Holder** at Lloydminster. **Sharon Gullekson** joined field services at Wetaskiwin, **Edward Phillipchuk** was hired as supervisor of product development at the Food Processing Development Centre at Leduc, and **Bill Chapman** became the regional crop production specialist at Barrhead.

Transfers: **Barbara Ogilvie** has transferred from Red Deer, where she was home design specialist, to Lacombe where she is the DHE. Other DHE transfers include **Ellen Frombach** from St. Paul to Sedgewick, **Chris Dudley** from Sedgewick to Thorhild, **Kathy Veltman** from Warner to Taber and **Diane MacKay** from Hanna to Ponoka. **Margaret Patton** transferred from field services at Leduc to financial services in Edmonton. **Elmona McNab** became senior secretary with field services in Barrhead. **Dale Zobel** transferred from the position of DA at Camrose to regional livestock specialist at Red Deer. **Mike Daggart** joined conservation and development in Edmonton, transferring from Vermilion. **Roy Panasiuk** became senior lab technician at the soil and feed testing lab in Edmonton. Two DAs transferred: **Ron Koots** from Warner to Drumheller, and **George Rock** from Vermilion to Camrose.

We wish the following people well as they leave Alberta Agriculture: **Sharon Lee-Williams**, **Tom Goddard**, **Bonnie Oliver**, **Debbie Brekke**, **Cathi Hayduk**, **Randy Ewen**, **Jane Marsh**, **Leonard Ring**, **Janet Thorsley**, **Bruce Jeffrey** and **Joanne Tremblay**.

Several alert readers spotted an error in the last *Ag-knowledge*: **Trevor Jones** is the regional livestock specialist in Fairview, not Lethbridge.

Ag-knowledge is sorry to report the deaths of two people known in Alberta Agriculture: **Dr. Terry Swanson**, our plant pathologist at Fairview, who was killed in the Wapiti air crash October 19; and **Harry Hargrave**, who worked in international marketing for several years.

